



Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture 1998

# VISION & VOLUNTARISM

Reviving Voluntarism  
in Jamaica

Don Robotham

## Preface

For this tenth Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture, following a digression in 1997 when the spotlight focused on political issues, with 'Westminster Style Democracy - The Jamaican Experience', we return to a discussion of a significant social subject: 'Vision and Volunteerism: Reviving Volunteerism in Jamaica'.

The Lecturer, distinguished anthropologist Dr. Don Robotham, begins by portraying the context of current social conditions in Jamaica: an escalating crime rate, in-discipline, deteriorating services, the skewedness of income distribution, the polarized divisiveness of the society. In his definition of 'volunteerism' he emphasizes the critical importance of the moral element and that the term applies not only to individuals but also to 'NFPOS', that is, not for profit organizations.

While agreeing that the spirit of volunteerism has declined, he does not consider its condition terminal. Outlining four periods of Jamaican history when this spirit was at its height, he emphasizes the powerful cultural traditions bequeathed to Jamaica's culture by Africa.

In making a case for a programme for 'manufacturing' volunteerism, Dr. Robotham calls for the development of voluntary community organizations and for a real public-private sector partnership; but it is imperative that these arrangements should be founded on a non-partisan, non-ideological basis.

The successful *Change from Within* project (which was supported by this Foundation) could serve as a launching pad for a formal system of volunteerism based in the schools; or it would, perhaps, be more feasible to begin at the tertiary level.

What is needed is a powerful unifying vision of a stable and prosperous Jamaica, guided by leadership which is all-inclusive and projects a new focus on issues which unite rather than those which divide us.

*Professor the Hon. Gladstone E. Mills, O.J., C.D.*  
*Chairman*  
*Grace, Kennedy Foundation*



## **DR. DON ROBOTHAM**

The Grace, Kennedy Foundation is working through a list of subjects identified at the initiation of the lecture series in 1989 as relevant and deserving of serious study.

The extent to which we have remained with that original list is a tribute to the visionaries who set the series going: and the library of valuable works generated over the intervening years is testimony to the excellent service rendered by our Lecturers year after year. The erudition and insights demonstrated by those Lecturers have contributed much to our nation's intellectual capital.

The Lecture Committee would like to claim some credit but, in honesty, they must restrict that claim to sound choice of subject matter and inspired choice of Lecturers.

For this year's lecture, however, the Committee has selected a subject which was not on the original list but which is in response to a disturbing trend observed in modern Jamaican civic and communal life - namely the withering of the true spirit of volunteerism in this country.

To explore and contextualize this important subject, we have invited someone supremely qualified to lead our thinking – Dr. Donald Keith Robotham, Pro-vice Chancellor and Dean of the

School for Graduate Studies and Research at the University of the West Indies, Mona.

Dr. Robotham is a graduate of the University of the West Indies in Sociology and of the University of Chicago where he gained his Ph.D. in Anthropology. Since then he has lectured in many institutions on the continents of Europe, Africa and America. He has led teams doing extensive research in many aspects of Jamaican social life.

More recently, Dr. Robotham has been consultant to the Canadian International Development Agency, USAID, and the Government of Jamaica. He is also frequently consulted by governments overseas on social and economic issues, as well as being a lecturer in great demand in different parts of the world and a contributor to numerous academic publications around the world.

Among his many publications, this interesting title caught my eye: *Militants or Proletarians? The economic culture of underground gold miners in Southern Ghana*, published by the African Studies Centre at Cambridge University.

Dr. Robotham is married and the father of four children. He is a Jamaican who has accomplished much - and who adds even more in this lecture.

*C. Samuel Reid*  
*Chairman*  
*Grace, Kennedy Lecture Committee*

## **Introduction**

Rapid changes are proceeding in the world and in the Jamaican society today. We all have heard at length about the shifts in the economy from the old natural-resource based industries such as sugar and bauxite to the more human-resource based ones such as tourism and financial and computer services. All of us are aware of the dramatic increase in our crime rate and, in particular, our homicide rates which in 1997 climbed, for the first time, above one thousand. We all experience the in-discipline of everyday life, the poor quality of our social services, especially public transportation. We are aware of the great and growing gap between the rich and the poor and what some people see as the shrinkage of the middle class. All throughout the society there is a feeling that selfishness and self-centredness prevail and that most people operate from a me-first principle. Perhaps the most striking and the least spoken about aspect of the changes has to do with the rapid growth in the urbanization of Jamaican society.

During the last five years, Jamaica has become one of the top four urbanizing societies in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the International Development Bank, Jamaica moved from being 47 per cent urban in 1975 to about 64 per cent urban today.<sup>1</sup> And this urbanization is of a peculiar pattern. It is no longer limited to people converging on Kingston, as in the past, or even on St Andrew. Setting apart the Portmore /Edgewater area, the pattern now is one of the growth of secondary urbanization.<sup>2</sup> What this means is that instead of adding to one big centre of urban sprawl in the Corporate Area, people are settling around the small rural townships, especially those connected with the tourist industry, such as Ocho Rios. This means that we can anticipate that the problems of urban life which are currently concentrated in Kingston and, to some extent, Montego Bay, will spread into these small urban centres: problems of social services - housing, transportation, water supply, education, crime.

In this unhappy context we have fortunately had the tremendously encouraging phenomenon of our football victories which have, if only briefly, given Jamaica an unprecedented sense of accomplishment, pride and unity. It is also in this context that those struggling for the unity of Jamaica and a new vision for the society have raised serious questions about the state of volunteerism in Jamaica today, asking whether this most important expression of the idealism and unity of a society is in historic decline.

This lecture, therefore, sets out to address the issue of volunteerism in Jamaican society; to make an assessment of the present state of affairs; to look back at the past and to attempt, if possible, to raise a number of questions about our future as a country and as a nation. Thus, what I will attempt to present is a discussion of volunteerism in the context of Jamaican society and to assess its potential within that framework.

## **What is Volunteerism?**

The question immediately arises as to what is meant by the concept of volunteerism and what is the special meaning which it takes on in the context of society.

There are various ways to approach the issue. One is by taking a fairly strict definition of the term and using this very clear yardstick to evaluate our situation. In this approach, volunteerism may be defined not with respect to the volunteer's activities or the absence of any material benefit for the actor, but in terms of the actor's motives. According to this strict approach, volunteerism is above all characterized by a certain motive in the actor, which could be said to be the participation in activities, usually of a social or civic nature, by an actor motivated by a desire to help others. This definition reflects an approach in which the essential feature of voluntary action is the disinterested motives of the actor. In a sense, in this approach, the essential point is whether the actor receives remuneration or not. The volunteer may receive some expenses but it is the spirit behind the action - it's essentially altruistic nature - which counts.

The problem with this approach is that it may well be too strict. For it may be doubted whether many human beings are capable of acting consistently on a purely altruistic basis over a prolonged period of time. In most cases, people act out of mixed motives in which an element of self-interest, even egoism, is involved. Be it the parents who volunteer to help in the PTA barbecue as long as their child is at school but who 'graduate' from volunteerism as their child graduates; or the individual in the service club who is involved in useful practical projects for a community but who is very anxious to obtain personal publicity in the news media, preferably on television. In many cases of what most people would regard as important acts of volunteerism, the motives are not completely pure.



It would also seem to me that a definition of volunteerism which depends solely on characterizing the motives of the actor, while critical, as we shall see in some respects, runs into the problem of how we could be sure of the motives of a person and how indeed would we even determine what these motives may or may not be. The same action may be prompted by very different motives and good may often be done as an unintended by-product even of evil actions. By the same token, we all know of many roads to hell, which were paved by the best of intentions but they lead to hell nonetheless. What we have, as a concrete fact to go by, is the action, and so any definition of volunteerism, which relies only on motive and downplays practical outcomes, is not very useful.

The other point of view is to look at volunteerism strictly from the point of view as to whether the person receives any remuneration for the activity or not. This definition is a highly instrumental one, which has the great advantage of establishing a practical and tangible measure of who is or is not a volunteer. From the point of view of persons and agencies that are active in the field in which volunteerism prevails this approach to determining what is volunteerism, is critical. If you take pay or profit, you are not a volunteer but if you don't cost the agency or the beneficiary anything in material terms, you are.

One may call this the labour market concept of the volunteer. If you have a market relationship with the work, whatever your inner motives may be and regardless of the type of activity that you are doing and its effect, you are not a volunteer and what you are doing is not a part of the volunteerism movement.

This provides an extremely clear-cut measure of who is or is not a volunteer, based entirely on wages, salary or profit received. In this model, voluntary activity is the obverse of the everyday market-related activity for which an individual or an enterprise receives an

income and which, in many cases, is the very reason for the actions of the individual and the existence of the organization. However, the first difficulty with such an approach is that it is entirely devoid of the moral element, which most people would probably agree is an essential aspect of what we usually mean by volunteerism. The moral (some prefer to call it 'spiritual') aspect is important not only because it is the rationale for the commendations which we give volunteers and why we may think highly of their actions and reward them with esteem. The importance of the moral aspect of volunteerism goes further: it is usually the very source of what we call such voluntary actions.

Without members of society having a moral feeling for one another, this 'moral sentiment' as Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers called it, neither volunteerism nor the society would be likely to exist at all. In other words, the purely instrumental definition of volunteerism does not tell us whence volunteerism sprang, only that it exists. Yet the very reason why we are discussing this issue is to try to understand not simply the fact of volunteerism but also its source. We want to strengthen volunteerism and so we must get down to some understanding of its root cause. To have a purely instrumental, market-based definition of volunteerism, while very convenient as a practical policy tool, is not adequate for the task we face.

What is more, most truly voluntary acts, especially in socially hazardous environments, require strong moral and spiritual resources to sustain the volunteer over the inevitable crises and disappointments, which are the daily bread of the volunteer in the field. When persons who seem at last to be winning the fight against drug addiction suffer a relapse, or when a promising teenager rescued from too early pregnancy does, in fact, become pregnant, or when the brightest young male abandons the homework programme to consciously enter the world of crime, then the great daily tragedy of human loss in Jamaican society

threatens to overwhelm the volunteer. At this point, some volunteers themselves despair and even withdraw into themselves. Others, who have learned to cope, weather the storm. For all, it is an emotionally searing experience that draws on every ounce of spiritual conviction and will power that they can muster.

For this reason, one outstanding worker in the voluntary field who, even as she emphasized the need for volunteers to have more business competence, said to me that she always pays close attention to the spiritual beliefs (broadly understood) of persons who wish to work with her in the field. "We operate like a family," she said, "very spiritual in our approach to our life and to our work.' We pray a lot and have faith and we have always come through." Thus, any definition of volunteerism in Jamaica, which omits this moral and spiritual aspect, will simply have failed to identify an essential part of what makes volunteerism possible.

A further point to note is that voluntary acts have also to take account of the beneficiary. Few of us would regard actions done for the benefit of one's children, for example, even though done from the highest motives and at great financial sacrifice, as fitting in with what we have in mind when we speak of volunteerism. It is therefore clear that, for the action to be regarded as volunteerism, it must primarily benefit other persons for whom society would not normally regard us as directly responsible. A citizen who mows the sidewalk grass in front of his house would hardly be regarded as a volunteer', since he and his family are the prime beneficiaries of his unpaid action. However, were he to mow all or a number of sidewalks in a neighbourhood other than the one in which he resides, in the interest of other citizens for whom he would not normally have responsibility, most would agree that this would be a case of volunteerism.

For these reasons, you will forgive me if I attempt to adopt a middle position in which volunteerism contains three components:

the motive of the actor; the factor of no remuneration which, from a practical point of view, is often critical and which in itself is a very important expression of the motivation of the actor; and third, the beneficiary.

On this basis we can begin with a view which argues that volunteerism can be defined as any action or course of action, usually of a social or civic nature, prompted primarily by altruistic motives, from which the actor does not obtain wages, salary or profit and in which the beneficiaries are people who are not normally the volunteer's direct responsibility. A definition is a guide and, therefore, no definition is perfect. What this approach seeks to do is to recognize the critical importance of the moral element in volunteerism which, I shall argue later, is at the heart of volunteerism in this country and also to acknowledge the reality that many volunteers do not have pure motives. At the same time, this approach tries to recognize that while in every case of volunteerism the actor does not receive wages, salary or profit, in most cases, from a practical point of view, costs are involved in carrying out almost any task in a market economy, no matter what the motive and who the beneficiary may be; and that, therefore, the volunteer will often have to have his or her expenses defrayed.

In keeping with our times, perhaps, may we start out with this relatively flexible definition of volunteerism, which allows us to consider as wide a range of the phenomenon as possible without, from the beginning, excluding too much. One immediate consequence of this approach is that there can be degrees of voluntary activity or, if you like, a weaker or stronger voluntary spirit represented in a given activity by an individual. In the very example given above of our citizen mower, if he mows the other sidewalks in his own neighbourhood we would not regard this action in the same light as our earlier example. Even though it is beneficial to persons for whom he is not normally responsible, he is also clearly enhancing the value of his own property. Also, this

approach allows us to include in the category under consideration, organizations which are clearly not-for-profit and whose entire reason for being may be the voluntary spirit. These, of course, need a budget because they have a core of full-time staff, they have to pay rent, pay their utilities, and pay their transportation costs and all the other expenses, which are normally incurred by any organization in a market society.

## **Is Volunteerism on the Decline in Jamaica**

The definition having been disposed of, the question now arises as to how do people perceive the state of volunteerism in Jamaica today?

Every single discussion I have had with people involved in the field, whether at the level of the well-known formal agencies such as the Council for Voluntary Social Services (CVSS) or United Way or in the specialized agencies, in the social sector or in the field of sport, there is a widespread perception that volunteerism is on the decline. Many people expressed the view that when people are asked today to perform some social task, let us say sit on the board of an agency or a school, they frequently inquire as to what payment, if any, is involved. Others say that the current crop of volunteers is aging and that one encounters the same small group of persons trying to do the self-same thing over and over again from meeting to meeting. Some have pointed out that many may not seek financial remuneration for voluntary activity but are so motivated by the desire for publicity that this overshadows any good which the work they are accomplishing might achieve. These are the so-called 'professional volunteers'. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, there is a general feeling that the spirit of the times has changed and that the time in which we live is inhospitable to volunteerism.

This latter view - that there is something in the climate of Society in Jamaica today, a spirit of selfishness and in-discipline - has been articulated at the level of the highest offices of the land. From there a call has gone out for the establishment of a national framework of order on the basis of which the economic and social development of Jamaica can proceed on a firm foundation.

So there is unanimity of perception in this area. We have no independent way of knowing what the true state of affairs is in this

regard. There is certainly no register of volunteers nor any database of voluntary associations, which one could use as a reliable base line against which to compare the present situation. We have no quantitative data of any degree of reliability in this field.

This is clearly an area in which we can start now to rectify if we wish to strengthen volunteerism in Jamaican society. We can agree, here and now, to begin to establish and maintain a database of volunteers and voluntary associations on a much more complete basis than any existing record so we can keep track of this most important barometer of our society's health and, if you like, of our social capital. We, after all, agree that it 'takes cash to care' and therefore we have to augment our capital in the economic sense as a matter of great urgency. But it also takes a certain amount of social consensus to have a society at all. Accounting for our social capital, then, is an extremely important task, which we must take definite steps to address.

In the absence of quantitative data, I am therefore going to make what I regard as the perfectly reasonable assumption that these persons who are knowledgeable and active in the field and who face the day to day burden of sustaining their activities and organizations on a shoestring budget, who are spending hours every week on the telephone and in meetings begging financial support, are perceiving reality accurately, although with what degree of accuracy one is unable to say.

I would submit that if people from as wide an array of voluntary organizations as I have consulted, from football clubs, through athletics, to those working on drug abuse, to community development, youth clubs, the churches and the areas of health - in the hallowed walls of this distinguished Foundation itself - and who are not in collusion with one another, have independently

expressed the emphatic conviction that volunteerism is on the decline in Jamaica, then these people are basically correct.

But what is cause for concern is not simply this unanimous perception that volunteerism is in decline. What one gets is more than that. One senses a fear that volunteerism is in crisis, in fact, in terminal decline. This is what is really at issue. This perception justifies an extended examination of the subject. It is the concern that, right before our very eyes, we are witnessing a fundamental shift in the values of the Jamaican people and that one critical aspect of this shift is an abandonment of altruistic attitudes and the replacement of these by a narrow individualism based on a shallow understanding of what a market economy necessitates. Every man and woman for himself or herself seems to be the slogan, which is expressed in all departments of Jamaican life, from how we behave on the roads, in the minibus, at sports events, at the workplace, and, of course, in our national affairs - in our politics - to how we behave in our families and among our friends.

This is the crucial issue. It is not difficult to appreciate that periods of history differ and that at one time volunteerism will be high and, during another period, perhaps not so high. That is cause for concern if one is living during a low period but not necessarily cause for alarm. What makes many of us pause is the feeling that the present decline goes beyond such variations: that the decline in volunteerism is part of a much wider picture in which, almost inexorably, a whole collapse of civil society is taking place in Jamaica. In other words, the real question before us is whether or not we are at a turning point in Jamaican society and are witnessing a historical decline in volunteerism?

I have to say, having discussed this matter with a close colleague, that, yes indeed, this is precisely the danger that we are facing and that, yes indeed, we are at a juncture of historic dimensions in the development of the very fabric of Jamaican society. My colleague



does not share what could be said to be my alarmist judgment on this matter. His view, which I now offer for your consideration and for, if I may say so, your sense of balance, is that though we may have many difficulties, we are not at a point of a historical decline, we are only in a lull.

But that is not my view. Without being alarmist, I have to differ. Jamaica, as a society, has many very positive things to offer. Many thousands of kind and morally outstanding actions take place in Jamaica every day. Every day many of our poorest citizens get up in the wee hours of the morning, get themselves ready to work, get their children ready for school, do kindness' for their neighbours without thinking of the slightest reward, share in each others' sorrows and take pleasure in each others' joy. This is going on every single day in Jamaica and, indeed, every single hour. Jamaica is not Bosnia during its troubles nor, for that matter, Algeria today where terror stalks the land in a very palpable way and in which grief and bloodshed are the daily bread of all. Football achievements aside, one only has to observe let us say, a young peanut vendor pushing his cart mile after mile in the intense sun to realize that the spirit of enterprise and hard work is alive and well in our people, battered perhaps but, as they say, unbowed.

It is my firm conviction that this Jamaican spirit is our most precious possession and our greatest hope, I would even say our only hope of building a better Jamaica in which the aspirations of all our citizens, moral and material, are met. Let us hail this spirit and hope that it may long endure. For if, as Jamaicans, we lose this, then we lose all.

But the knowledge that this indomitable spirit is still present in our country and that positives are occurring every day in the society does not reassure me in the least. It does nothing to alter the fact that we are at a critical juncture. Jamaica may not be an Algeria; in fact many parts of Algeria can be even more peaceful than the

most peaceful parts of Jamaica. There, too, amidst the killing, everyday life has to and does go on. People are kind to one another there too, perhaps all the more so, given the situation. Yet no one would dispute that Algerian society - which, lest we forget, was one of the leading developing societies in the 1970s and many, in the West as well as in the East, thought it was a leader in the process of development - is in the deepest of political and social crises.

So it is, I fear, with the situation here in our beloved Jamaica. The callous bloodletting reflected in our ever increasing homicide rate, though it takes a terrible and utterly unbearable toll on the families and friends who suffer untold sorrow as a result, is not my main reason for feeling that we are at a critical point. After all, although it is a terrible thing, many societies at various points in their history have had high homicide rates, which did not necessarily indicate a deep malaise widespread throughout the society.

My sense of crisis comes from my everyday personal experience of life in a Jamaica which is becoming ever more volatile and unpredictable, ever more coarse, ever more directionless. This sense of crisis is not based on crime rates, not even on Gross Domestic Product stagnation rates nor on the growth of drug abuse or any of the laboriously constructed (and boring) indices of the quality of life and purchasing power parity developed by our friends in the United Nations and the multilateral agencies. The data they present for Jamaica are alarming enough and by themselves suggest strongly that the island is facing extremely serious problems, compared, let us say, to Barbados.

My measure of crisis is much more qualitative and subjective but, for me and I suspect for others, more alarming. For it is based on direct personal everyday experience of the quality of our social interactions. This is a sense that the common bond among ourselves as citizens is becoming weaker and weaker; that

altercations can develop at any moment: that people hurl abuse at one another in the most violent language in response to what seem to be insignificant misunderstandings: that simple politeness and civility are perceived to be a fatal display of weakness; that people indulging in coarse and vulgar behaviour are not even aware that it is coarse and vulgar behaviour; that, finally, nobody knows what Jamaica stands for any more or what this term 'Jamaica' could possibly mean. In my judgment, it is this loss of direction and this pervasive sense that Jamaica is not a moral, but only a geographical, expression that is at the root of the crisis of volunteerism in Jamaica today. It cuts across all classes and colours.

Only last week, I was driving along Trafalgar Road past the gas stations across from the British High Commission, trying against the odds to find some way of getting into New Kingston in the early afternoon traffic. A very elderly lady of European descent emerged aggressively from one of the gas stations, planted her car across the line of traffic and forcefully bored her way into the line of traffic, compelling tanker and taxi driver, as we say, in our inimitable fashion, to 'back weh!' I recognized her as the matriarch of one of our most distinguished Jamaican families, a pillar of her church, a mainstay of her community and of our social life, and quickly got out of her way. Our redoubtable Senior Superintendent for Traffic is in for some surprises if he thinks slaying the taxi driver dragon is his sole challenge in his domain!

Let me repeat for those who may not have heard or who heard and did not understand: this is behaviour which all of us indulge in more and more. We are facing what we used to call, in our Marxist days an 'all class crisis'. It is as if we are all participating in the unique experience of living in a society while its very fabric is steadily unraveling every single day before our eyes. Nobody seems to be able to do anything about it except to withdraw to what a friend of mine called 'our little islands of friendships', from

which we watch the society fall apart. It is as if we have built upon sand and the sand is going through a slow process of liquefaction so that the society, as we know it, is melting away. One needs to retain one's sense of balance in such an unstable situation. But the way to do it is not to bury one's head in the sand. Talk about the need to 'accentuate the positive' is worse than useless in such a situation.

There is evidence to show that I am not alone in seeing the situation in such acute terms and that sympathetic foreigners see us in the same way. A remarkable article appeared in the Gleaner last year, written by the international tax lawyer Michael O'Reilly and entitled 'What happened to Jamaica? O'Reilly, an Irishman who has been coming to Jamaica regularly on business since about 1992 and who is obviously drawn to Jamaican culture, wrote:

*... One looks at the natural beauty of the island, the fertility of its soil, the obvious resourcefulness of its people in the face of extraordinary adversity, the richness of its churches and religious practices, the outstanding sporting achievements. And yet the country is little short of a living disaster .4*

It is no use, in such a situation, to expect volunteerism to flourish because volunteerism is not a policy, like high interest rates that one can raise to a higher or lower level by a government or private sector decision. One can set up a FINSAC to restructure the financial sector but one cannot set up a MORSAC to rescue the moral sector. Volunteerism is not a tap that one can turn on or off at will nor like one's electricity supply that can be cut off today and turned back on the following day after the bill has been paid. This was proved by the well-meaning but hardly successful campaign for better Values and Attitudes, launched during the last administration and which now seems to be trying to re-launch itself

I was involved in that campaign and so were many other Jamaicans. In fact, the campaign did achieve some useful things, but it did not succeed. Although it identified and criticized the negative characteristics of the society, which had caused the decline in values, it could not set out a new system of values, which could inspire the nation. To nobody's surprise, the negative forces loose in the society proved to be more powerful than the campaign.

So it is also with volunteerism. It cannot be generated by incentives, new and more flexible voluntary organizations, better training programmes for volunteers, more prestige for volunteers, not even by having major awards for outstanding volunteers nor by any of the other fertile ideas of concerned people who work in the voluntary field. All of these are very good and should be put into practice. However, they are likely, in my judgment, to reward the existing group of hardworking persons, which is certainly necessary, but without drawing many fresh forces into the field.

For one thing, it is a contradiction in terms to reward volunteerism since, properly speaking, the voluntary act itself is its own reward. Let me hasten to add that I am strongly in favour of establishing major national awards to encourage volunteerism, of developing a system of incentives (a more advanced system of tax relief, for example) and other practical steps. These are extremely important and should be implemented as a matter of urgency. But we should not deceive ourselves. This is not a problem that can be cured by money and resources, although more money and resources are necessary and welcome. It is a problem that goes to the very core of the kind of Jamaica we have today and the direction that we are taking.

## **Manufacturing Volunteerism**

Today, Jamaica is a country without an accepted vision, although some efforts are being made to construct one. As a result, the voluntary movement operates in a void, without any set of ideals to inspire it and bring new recruits. This does not mean that volunteerism is dead in Jamaican society and that all must now rely on the state for whatever social benefits are to be obtained. But it does mean that voluntary organizations face some very serious obstacles in trying to carry out their work and that we now have to examine in which we can, if you will, manufacture volunteerism.

In preparing this lecture, I spoke to a wide range of people and it struck me that there does exist still a strong desire in Jamaica to join in volunteer work, especially among youth groups. In fact, there seems to have been a growth of newer organizations within the last ten years, which are run by more highly trained professionals who have recruited a permanent staff supported by some voluntary assistance. In today's Jamaica it is indisputable that no voluntary agency can operate on love and commitment alone. It is very important for us to realize that now virtually every effective voluntary organization in Jamaica, with the notable exception of the football clubs, requires a core of professionals to maintain it. This has become the normal pattern everywhere in the world. Let us not forget that, in its heyday, Jamaica Welfare had 85 full-time staff members. We should not, therefore, be under the impression that volunteers alone, necessary though they may be, could make up the entire complement of an effective organization.

Another important element that surfaced in more than one interview was the need for volunteers who have both business sense and experience and, of course, are trustworthy. This need arises from the precarious financial circumstances of most voluntary organizations, which compel staff and volunteers to

spend much of their time on the telephone trying to raise money to keep the organization alive. Voluntary organizations are also far more likely to apply to international agencies for funding, so volunteers with skills in project writing, management and appraisal or who know how to raise and manage money become essential to the success of an organization. Indeed, the job of financial management may be much more onerous in a non-profit organization since the funds tend to be scarce, the demands never-ending and scrutiny by donors very intense. This is one area in which our voluntary efforts could, perhaps, be more effective. Rather than thinking of supporting social efforts by dealing directly with communities and clients, it might be much more useful for volunteers to take on back-room responsibilities, which are essential for the smooth functioning of the organization, itself.

In general, it is important for volunteers to understand the necessity to be professional in their work. Some agencies report that, at times, there are volunteers who carry out a task sloppily because they are not charging for their services. They come late or not at all to an appointment or cancel at short notice. Some find it hard to understand that they need training in what is to be done, especially if it is in fields, which impact on interpersonal relationships with the client and on his or her psychological state.

From the accounts of my informants, a naive notion of what volunteerism entails seems to prevail, and it is necessary to dispel the myths. Volunteerism is hard, demanding work, which must be done to a high standard. In other words, volunteers and potential volunteers need education and information about what volunteerism entails. One very important task to consider, therefore, is the preparation of some attractive publicity and educational material, which could be used both to recruit and to educate volunteers. Such a project should not be too costly and, combined with the use of television to encourage programmes

Which highlight the importance of the activities of volunteers could go a long way to stimulate public interest in volunteerism.

At the same time, however, it has to be recognized that volunteers who do not have that extra moral or spiritual commitment from within are not likely to last long in today's difficult social environment. Anyone who takes up voluntary work today needs to be mentally tough and levelheaded and not easily discouraged. For example, one of the critical areas of volunteerism in this country, which is often unrecognized, is that of sport. Activities, such as athletics and club football would simply cease to exist were it not for a small group of dedicated volunteers. In athletics, teachers play an important part, as do former athletes who love of sport. But this is a dwindling band, in the main from an earlier generation.

Football clubs are heavily dependent on a few determined individuals who combine love for the game with a deep love of their communities. There is a determination in those who give voluntary support to inner-city football clubs that they intend to show 'uptown' communities that inner city youths are as good as, if not better than, them. And they wish to assure the inner-city youths that they have a future and that with discipline and hard work they can achieve at the highest levels. They seek to raise the self-esteem of the inner-city communities and help to remove the social stigma, which is often attached to them in Jamaican society.

In the past months of preparing this lecture, I have met some of these sports volunteers and I can say that they are people who have deeply moral motivations and who make enormous sacrifices in time, career, funds and their own private life, to serve the members, players and supporters of their clubs. There is no reward other than what one described to me as the sweet satisfaction of defeating an 'uptown' team. On the contrary, many of these volunteers suffer abuse from the team supporters, on a regular basis, because they disagree on team selection. Others have



received very serious threats to their lives on more than one occasion. One extremely successful volunteer explained to me how he has quietly modified his movements - leaving the area earlier and travelling by different routes -because of one very serious threat which he received recently. It has not weakened his moral commitment but he may still have to bow to the concerns of his family and retire. What is of concern in such cases is that the volunteers do not see any successors on the horizon. Most of them function in a zone in which fear and intimidation are present and one has to keep one's wits about one at all times. Yet, drawing on their personal vision of what Jamaica could be, they continue to give of their all in the service of their community and their nation.

Is this level of volunteerism enough? Is this all we can hope for in the 1990s? I think that the answer to both these questions is 'No'. I would argue that there is good reason to believe that we can develop a programme of *manufacturing* volunteerism in three key areas: in community organizations; in public interest groups; and in the school system. Let us begin by exploring the possibilities at the community level.

A survey of people's attitudes to political participation, carried out in the Corporate Area and Portmore in 1991 by the late Derek Gordon, Patricia Anderson and a colleague, presented some interesting data, later published in their study, *Urbanization and the Years of Crisis*. People from a number of lower middle and working class areas were asked how willing they were to participate in national politics as opposed to participating in community actions and in support of what Gordon called 'neighbourhood power'. The answers were revealing: in the middle class, 48% said they were in favour of participating in national political activity, 33.9% of the working class and 46.7% of the poor answered likewise. When it came to those who were in favour of community action, the figures were 82.5% for the middle class; 85.5% for the working class and 85.9% for the poor. As far as

neighbourhood power was concerned, the figures were similar: 87.7% of the middle class, 85.2% of the working class and 91.4% of the poor were in favour. **22**

Gordon and his colleagues looked at the data from several directions: by years of education, by 'subjective social class' (that is, the class in which people classified themselves) and by whether persons felt that the economic position of their families had improved in the last ten years or not. In all cases, the results were the same: people uniformly rejected participation in national politics and were in favour of community action and neighbourhood power by an overwhelming margin. In fact, in this study, the people who said that the economic circumstances of their family had improved in the last ten years (14% of the sample) were the ones who registered the greatest willingness for participation in both national politics (54%) and, especially, community action (88.4%) and neighbourhood power (91.1%). At the same time, while the percentage of all groups in favour of local level activities never fell below 82%, the authors expressed doubts about what the data really revealed. In their study they commented:

*Although our responses in Table 7.13 suggest that there should be a high level of support for community development and mobilization efforts, the level of organization activity that respondents described in their own neighborhood was, in fact, quite low. In most cases, this was limited to a sports club or a citizens association. While our data may point to an unrealized potential, it is difficult to assess whether this can be translated into effective grassroots mobilization and action.*

*In spite of that sobering observation, we can take some comfort from the fact that people in the Corporate Area and Portmore do have some limited participation in voluntary sports clubs and citizens associations and that a great willingness is stated for persons to participate in voluntary*

*activity, within their own community. This suggests that an effort to build volunteerism on an island-wide basis is probably not the most effective strategy at the present time.*

**23**

It is a fair interpretation of the data presented in the study to say that people are in favour of participating in local community action but they lack any effective institutional means through which to do so, other than the political party and criminal gang structures. The church seems to be ineffective in this regard because many church members, including the Ministers of Religion, do not live in the community in which the church is located. I think that findings of the study are confirmed by the relative success of the Neighbourhood Watch Programme in which citizens participate voluntarily because they can see it is clearly in their self-interest so to do. Obviously, this is not a solution to our dilemma but it is a very important reality of which the voluntary movement must take advantage. It suggests that we must focus our efforts on mounting a major effort to develop voluntary community organizations at the local level. It means that we would be beginning the process of taking back our communities from the Dons, be they criminal or political. For, make no mistake about it; we would be, in effect, trying to establish a rival system of authority at the local levels of our society.

I regard this, the taking back of our communities, to be of the highest importance if we are to have any hope of ever bringing down our crime rate, stabilizing our society, developing greater social cohesiveness and achieving sustained economic growth. The importance of such a thrust goes beyond volunteerism as such: it is admitting that the present local framework of Jamaican society is rotten through and through and that it is essential for all well-thinking Jamaicans to begin to set in place a more wholesome structure. Taking back our communities is more important than the

continuous trivia about constitutional reform. It is the necessary social basis without which no reform, constitutional or otherwise, can be effective. It is the basis for the reform of the police to be effective. It is the only possible hope of beginning to encourage investment to come into these communities and so generate jobs and economic development.

Economists no longer debate whether macroeconomic stability is a vital precondition for economic growth to take place in any country. Most sociologists, if they thought about it, would probably agree that social stability is also a necessary precondition for growth. We seem to be making progress when it comes to the former, but we are steadily losing ground in the case of the latter. Jamaica desperately needs social stability, firstly for its own sake and the sake of our citizens; and secondly in order to create a framework in which we can attract foreign and local investment, address the issues of raising our very low savings rate and of developing sustained rates of economic growth. Voluntary community organizations have the potential to play a critical role in setting us onto the road to social stability.

In these new community organizations and citizens' associations, free of partisanship and politics, citizens together would, in their self-interest, address a range of issues at the community level: crime, sanitation, the environment, the schools in the area, public transportation, youth activities and local community bulletins and newspapers, where feasible. The latter would give the community a means of projecting the best image of itself and to build cohesiveness and self-esteem. In fact, in some cases, it might even be appropriate for a community to address regional economic development issues, such as how to devise a package of incentives which could attract investment and the resulting employment into some of these communities in the manner of the so-called 'empowerment zones' in the United States and the regional development agencies in the United Kingdom. Legislation would

probably be needed if the incentive aspects of these development programmes were to be effectively implemented.

The second area in which the manufacturing of volunteerism is probably feasible is in the establishment of voluntary public interest organizations in Jamaica and the expansion of existing ones. As is well known, this single interest, voluntary organizations have become very active and effective in other countries, especially in the United States, Canada and in Europe, where they are typified by, for example, the very strong environmental lobby and the so-called 'not in my backyard' voluntary neighbourhood movements. In fact, studies from the United States show that the success of this new volunteerism derives from two factors: the presence in the society of a group of very well-educated professionals; and the experience of many of these professionals in the social activism of the 1960s and 1970s. The same trend seems to be at work in Europe, particularly in Germany." These groups use very modern means to develop their organizations: brief formal meetings, data bases, the Internet, modern research techniques, desktop publishing, modern financial instruments, e-mail and modern communications and publicity techniques. These methods are not very costly, even in Jamaica, and are already to some extent being used very effectively by some in the local environmental movement.

We have the potential for such a combination in Jamaica, though, of course, on an incomparably smaller scale. We have a small core of professionals with a high level of technical competence who, it is true, are often very stretched. I can assure you that many of these extremely capable professionals, now in their forties and fifties, were very active in the 1970s in various forms of social and political volunteerism, be it JAMAL, youth clubs or the women's movement. Many are today the mainstays of the Past Students and Parent-Teacher Associations. For many of them, disillusionment with the radical politics of the past is exceeded only by their utter

contempt for the uninspiring politics of the present. I believe that in this island there is also a fund of talent among many groups, and especially our professionals, which could be tapped for voluntary purposes, but under some very strict conditions. One is that any activity of this kind must be completely non-political and non-ideological; the second that very clear issues of self or community interest must be at stake; and the third that there must be institutional vehicles which can capture this, if you will, 'positive professional' volunteerism.

I want, therefore, to use this occasion to call for a real private-public partnership in those two areas: a new effort to promote community/ citizens' association development; and the fostering of voluntary public interest groups in Jamaica, I would invite the officers of the Grace Kennedy Foundation, the Private Sector Organization and the relevant government ministries to put together a small task force to begin to work out the details of such a plan. Needless to say, such an effort must be completely nonpartisan and must be seen to be such, otherwise them from the start. This requires great statesmanship in our leadership, statesmanship of the Mandela level. I would not blame you for concluding that the required level of statesmanship is simply absent from Jamaica today.

Let me say, however, that even without public policy support, it is still possible to achieve much by developing a new and modern community/citizens' association movement in Jamaica. If there is one thing which Norman Manley and DTM Girvan proved in the 1930s and 1940s, it was that these things can happen in Jamaica without the participation of governments if *they have strong private sector support, local and, yes, foreign. This is one of the often-overlooked lessons of Jamaica Welfare, conveniently brushed under the carpet. It was not the colonial government who started it, nor was it the political parties, for there were none at the time. Jamaica Welfare was started by a prominent lawyer and*

financed by a transnational corporation - the notorious United Fruit Company.

You will forgive me here, I hope, if I presume to offer some advice to the private sector: it is understandable that your leadership has focused on the critical economic and business issues facing your membership and the nation. However, any group which confines itself to only one section of national life, however important that single section may be, cannot hope to sustain national leadership. Leadership, for it to be effective, must be exercised broadly, in all the main spheres of our economic, social and cultural life. If we agree that strong private sector leadership is a precondition of economic development in a market-driven economy, then it is important for the private sector to exercise such leadership on issues affecting society as a whole. This means that the private sector, too, is in need of statesmanlike leadership, able to address major social problems convincingly and to win public support for its positions. If Norman Manley and Samuel Zemurray could do this in 1937, surely it can be done again in 1998?

Some say that the private sector's leadership is in retreat, exhausted by the efforts made in fighting off the threats from the Left in the 1970s and by the financial collapse of the 1990s. Others say that the private sector is incapable of providing strong, united leadership unless it faces a clear common enemy, as in the 1970s. It is true that the enemy today - the breakdown of civil society in Jamaica - is more diffuse. But it is a far more insidious and dangerous enemy. Many argue that it was precisely the fact that there were no national political parties in 1937, which created the space, which made Jamaica Welfare possible. This is true, but is there not a similar space today? Do we not have a consistent set of polls which show that the hold of the political parties over the loyalties of the population has substantially diminished? Did not an unprecedented 40 per cent of the population abstain in the recent general elections? Did we not have a significant turnout of non-

partisan volunteers for the Citizens' Action for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE) on Election Day? These facts lead me to believe that a similar 'space' for voluntary action exists in Jamaica today but it requires concerted, non-political action from the private sector to fill that space.

In this context, I would reiterate what I said at the beginning: Jamaica is one of the top four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean when it comes to rates of urbanization. Obviously, the areas in the most immediate need of these voluntary citizens' associations are our rapidly growing urban communities. They are in a dire state, especially our inner-city communities, and if we continue to ignore this reality there can be little doubt that our homicide rate will continue to rise ever higher and higher. This suggests that we should, in the first instance, start with a thrust to revive volunteerism in urban areas, since these are indisputably where the greatest needs (and, perhaps, also the greatest skills) are concentrated.

But the restoration of the citizens' association movement of the 1930s at a local level and the development of public interest organizations in the 1990s will not be enough for volunteerism to have a unifying impact on Jamaican society. The reason is the spatial social segregation of our communities, which is a fact of life in nearly all our urban centres, especially in the Corporate Area. We do not have any recent objective measures of this segregation, although a number of persons have produced work on this issue in the past." However, Gordon and his colleagues did ask persons in 1991 for their perception of spatial social polarization. Fifty-five per cent of the middle class group said that there was greater spatial polarization in Jamaican society in the past ten years than in the previous ten; the figures for the working class and the poor were 70.4 per cent and 71.1 per cent respectively. Again, this perception of greater polarization correlates inversely with social position, with less educated and poorer groups consistently



reporting a perception of greater polarization .**26** What this means, therefore, is that local community volunteerism could well have the effect of reinforcing spatial social segregation in Jamaica. Community action and public interest activity by Jamaican professionals will not be enough, vital as they are. We must foster volunteerism in such a way that it will unify at the national level. What, then, can be done?

The question takes us to the third area of manufactured volunteerism, which I believe is feasible. If we agree that the generation of a voluntary spirit is vital for the social cohesion of our society as well as for the continued viability of our voluntary organizations, then we must take the necessary action at an early stage in the life of the population. Essentially, this means the introduction of volunteerism into the school system at a national level.

I feel strongly that in a society as violent, unstable and strife-torn as Jamaica is, the school system takes on a truly critical importance. The school is the place where future citizens are being prepared for adult leadership and membership of the society, where close to 40 per cent of the population can be found on any given weekday. It is an institution funded largely by public funds. Unlike the family, into which it is very difficult for public policy to intervene, the school is a very available instrument for policy. For example, the *Change from Within* project, developed and led by Sir Philip Sherlock and supported by this Foundation, was tested in a small number of urban schools in which teachers were mobilized to foster peaceful and non-violent attitudes and behaviour among the students. Its success, although on a limited scale, proved that the Jamaican school could be an effective avenue through which changes could be made in Jamaican society.

It is, however, time to go further, building on the success of *Change from Within*. I would like to propose that we establish a

formal system of volunteerism, using the schools as the framework of organization. And further that we find ways of integrating this new system with the already established organized volunteerism of the CVSS and United Way to create a seamless national volunteer system. What I have in mind is not a revival of a National Youth Service, which has been revived on a voluntary basis. What I have in mind is the introduction of a whole system in the schools, in which *the curriculum would include civic education and voluntary activity as subjects for which credit would be given*. In fact, the University of Science and Technology already has quietly had such a requirement for voluntary service for their students for many years. Without the necessary credits from this activity, students cannot graduate. Some years ago, the University of the West Indies established its own version of such a system on a voluntary basis and I am given to understand that this year at least one thousand students are involved.

These school-based systems should integrate community and other public volunteer activity with that in sports and other co-curricular activities. For, as we have seen above, sports volunteerism is one of the most extensive networks of volunteerism in the country. The national systems themselves have to find a way to integrate the sports volunteers, who are often the ones most active in inner city communities and the ones who have the potential to have the biggest impact on young males. It is, therefore, essential to find practical ways of integrating their work into that of the traditional organizations. This would have a double potential: to revitalize the traditional voluntary bodies with new blood and, at the same time, broaden the social mandate and agenda of those who work with youth in sports.

Most important of all, however, is that both systems should be integrated with an existing national system of volunteerism linked by the school-based programmes. Our students would have been involved in voluntary activity as part of their school programme

but on graduation they would not cease to be volunteers. On the contrary, the school volunteer programme would have ensured that the students were channeled from their youth into a lifelong pattern of voluntary activity. Today we have limited voluntary programmes within our school system and we have established national voluntary organizations crying out for help. But there is little connection between the two. School-based volunteerism must be developed and linked quite explicitly to the existing national system. In other words, we borrow the economists' concept of 'backward and forward linkages' and use that idea to establish a permanent feeder stream from our schools for our adult voluntary organizations. Another possibility would be for the existing national volunteer organizations to reach down into the school system and begin to develop youth branches there on a systematic basis. By closely integrating and synchronizing school and national programmes, including sports, a large number of our young people could be introduced to the ethically positive experience of being involved, from the earliest age possible, to voluntary activity. Once we have planted that seed, our intention would be to make it the norm for our young people to pass smoothly from the early phase of voluntary activity in their school life to the following phase of public voluntary activity for the remainder of their adult life.

In countries, more unified than ours, such programmes might be regarded as luxuries. In Jamaica, where the fabric of civil society is in tatters, inculcating positive social values and habits through the school system is a necessity. It is time, therefore, to take the experience of these programmes, to learn from them and distil them into a viable national programme. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to urge the leaders of the private sector, the relevant government ministries - Education, Sports, Local Government and Community Development - and the voluntary agencies, to put together a small group to examine this proposal carefully. If it is found to be feasible, an action plan for its implementation could then be prepared.

Clearly, it would be no simple matter to implement such a programme and probably it would be wiser to start at the tertiary level, with Universities and Colleges. After the feasibility study, the action plan would define how it would be organized, financed, managed, made transparent and accountable in its workings - and how it would be publicly supervised. This last point is of the greatest importance because the whole point of such an effort would be lost if it were simply a public sector operation run by a department of the Ministry of Education. I have in mind something different: the establishment of a body, managed by a private-public group, which would be organized, so as to intersect with the teachers in the school in a kind of matrix relationship. This organization would provide an institutional vehicle for persons of all classes and colours in Jamaica to relate to students in the schools, and to one another, in a relatively structured setting. Persons could act as mentors or be involved in tutoring and students could be involved in a wide range of voluntary activity which would cut across traditional social barriers. Students would receive credits for their volunteerism, probably for graduation purposes but other forms of incentives could also be considered.

We would need widespread public discussion, a well-thought-out plan and a pilot programme to test such a concept and to iron out the kinks. We would need to phase in such a programme carefully and over a period of time. Most important of all, we would have to ensure that such a programme remained resolutely non-ideological, resolutely non-partisan, that it realized the clearly stated goal of building social unity in Jamaica and that it be itself voluntary, at least until it had proved itself trustworthy. Given our history, we cannot be too careful about how we approach this matter for what I am proposing is nothing less than that volunteerism be taught and practiced, on an appropriate scale, in the education system on a national basis. The basic purpose would be that, through this means, we would inculcate attitudes and

habits of volunteerism and, at the same time, provide the practical experience of managing such a complex activity.

Despite the bad experience we have had with such social experiments, and the pitfalls of all civilian national service organizations in the public sector, it is imperative that we find means of strengthening our social order. Volunteerism at the community level and special-issue public-interest organizations is not enough, although a concerted effort to encourage them is absolutely critical. The thesis of this lecture is that volunteerism of the larger, more national, kind essentially depends on the members of the society sharing a vision of what that society can be like. But we have no such vision in Jamaica today. We cannot afford to wait for the generation of such a vision. We must have the courage to act now to, if you will, manufacture volunteerism and manufacture social unity and stability.

The school system is the means we should use for our action. It is unrivalled as an instrument in its reach into the minds of large numbers of the population. If we can ensure that we do not repeat the divisive errors of the past, and if we boldly cleanse such policies of their ideological and polarizing character, then I believe that a number of those policies have the potential to enhance the social stability of the society.

It is true that this is a somewhat factitious route to volunteerism - to put it on the school curriculum as a kind of elective subject for which credits would be given. It is true that even this manufactured school-driven volunteerism, undertaken on an island-wide scale, would be no substitute for the genuine volunteerism, which a powerful vision of a stable and prosperous Jamaica would inspire. Nevertheless, it has the potential to take us further down the road in the direction of the shared experiences out of which such broader visions spring. It is an approach to enhancing our social stability and fostering volunteerism, which is well-worth pursuing.

It also presents an opportunity for Jamaicans of all classes and colours to work together in voluntary activity. In the course of these endeavours we will also have an opportunity to rediscover our common Jamaicanness, to appreciate one another more for what we are and for what each and every one of us brings to the common efforts to develop a nation.

## **The Four Peaks of Volunteerism in Jamaican History**

Volunteerism reached unprecedented levels during four periods in Jamaican history: these were the period of abolition of the Slave Trade and Emancipation from Slavery; the period of the rise of Black Nationalism under the leadership of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s; the nationalist movement in the late 1930s; and, finally, the Socialist period in the 1970s. In each of these periods, the surge of volunteerism was driven by a set of ideals, which attempted to speak to the issues of the time, however inadequately. Let us look briefly at each of these periods and consider the relationship between the vision and the ideals which were characteristic of each phase.

Before we do so, however, it is well to remind ourselves that within all the cultural traditions, which flow into the Jamaican stream there is a powerful tradition of volunteerism. In the case of African traditions, one only has to recall the long traditions of 'day-for-day' and 'morning sport' in which unpaid labour is given to a neighbour who may or may not return it. These traditions are widespread all over Africa, although they are dying fast there as they have here also. There is also the practice of adopting children and young people and 'growing' them out of a spirit of kindness as well as a desire, sometimes, to have children of one's own. Then there were the burial societies, another ancient African practice, which provided the cultural foundation for the development of modern building societies in Jamaica.

Indeed, the African tradition has an extremely powerful thrust towards fostering volunteerism because of the strong village community feeling on which much of ancient African culture is based. This communal tradition gave a powerful sense of identity to the tribe (some would say too powerful) and made it an almost absolute duty of all members of the village community to understand that they had to look after the common water supply,

they had to keep their community well bushed, they had to maintain the village paths and generally to help one another without any thought of personal gain.

This sense of communal responsibility was ingrained and underpinned by religious beliefs in the sacredness of the social order. Once the social order was regarded as one created by the gods, then the concept of ethics generated was, necessarily, a social one. As Rattray, the famous anthropologist of Africa who never tired of emphasizing this point, put it: "Corporate responsibility for every act was an established principle which survived even the advent of a powerful central authority as the administrator of public justice."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as I have written elsewhere, Asante jurisprudence in Ghana, whence many Jamaicans originate, based its justification for extreme punishments by the central authority of either the state or the elders on the corporate concept of Oman Akyiwadie - things 'hateful' to the nation. <sup>7</sup> The justification for the administering of capital punishment by the state, or for expulsion from the clan and lineage by the elders (tantamount to the same thing), was that this was the only way to absolve the group of its social guilt for the crime of its member who had committed the murder or suicide.

Rattray also wrote: "Every offence was a potential source of danger to his group, for its members were all held to have been equally responsible for the injury committed, and all were thus likely to be made to suffer for it." <sup>8</sup> Failure to punish and to uphold the tradition would have brought harm not only to the entirely innocent members of the lineage group of the offender, but also to the society as a whole - to the Chief himself and the wider community. Thus, the women would cease to bear children, the crops would wither on the vine, the hunters would hunt no more, nor would the miners find gold. Drought and pestilence would cover the entire land in retribution for the sin committed by one person. Therefore, the state and the elders had the duty to impose



such a punishment and likewise the guilty had the 'duty' to endure and even take heroic satisfaction from it. The ethics, which were brought over from Africa to Jamaica, were thus social ethics based on notions of collective responsibility for the members of the group, although not necessarily for those outside the group. It is not difficult to see how, in such an environment, volunteerism would flourish as a natural, expected, if you like, 'organic', part of social life - so natural, in fact, that people probably would not consciously label it as 'volunteerism'.

Likewise, the sense of mutual obligation was also a strong part of the European tradition, in England as well as in continental Europe. Apart from the practice of having common lands in the countryside during the Middle Ages, and even into the modern period, it was the case that the guilds of apprentices, journeymen and master craftsmen all maintained special 'apprentices funds' for the voluntary assistance of their weaker members.<sup>9</sup> It was this tradition, which led workers to form mutual aid societies in the eighteenth century in England and which, of course, ultimately realized itself in both the trade union and the cooperative movements. The practice in many parts of Europe, also, was that "care of the poor was allotted proportionally to the farmers of the village... The simplest form of caring for the poor consisted in every farm allowing a proportionate number of needy to eat at the table or to sleep in the barn." <sup>10</sup> Indeed, the writings of de Swann and others make it very clear that the modern notions of the Welfare State in Europe and of the German concept of the 'social-market economy' have deep roots in the old religious traditions of community responsibility and volunteerism which probably pre-date the Christian period. <sup>11</sup>

Thus, however dormant volunteerism may be in Jamaica today, there can be no doubt that the traditions are there waiting to be revived, fed by the traditions which every single ethnic group in

Jamaica possesses. One such upsurge took place at the time of the Emancipation from Slavery in 1838.

When slavery ended, many were concerned not only with the abolition of the old slave society but also particularly with the nature of the new society, which would emerge. Among those who most strongly held a clear vision of what the new society would look like were the Baptist missionaries, especially William Knibb. His view of the new society was one in which those who had previously been slaves would be transformed into free, independent villagers, each with his own plot of land.

Knibb's image of Jamaica as a society of estates and freeholders settled in villages built around their church was the central driving force behind the voluntary efforts of him and his church during that period. Jamaicans of African descent who had only recently been enslaved would own their own plots of land 'under their own vine and fig tree'. As a consequence, because they were small property holders, they would secure the right to vote and, eventually, to stand for election, based on the property franchises, which obtained at the time. Jamaica would become a free Christian country of small and estate holders with some rights of self-government exercised in a property franchise.

Thus Knibb and others, propelled by this vision, set about the great Free Village movement in Jamaica at the time of Emancipation.<sup>12</sup> They obtained funds from England to assist the people to acquire lands from abandoned estates. They then assisted those now free to lay out their villages and to subdivide the plots of land in an orderly fashion. House and chapel construction was the next order of the day, and the building of roads and other civil works. Much of this work was done by voluntary efforts, with the people helping one another in the great task of trying to establish a free society. As a result of these efforts, as Douglas Hall recounted, the number of landholdings over 500 acres declined by 11 per cent between 1840

and 1845, while the number between 10-49 acres in size increased by 91 per cent. The number of very small land holdings - the under 10-acre group -increased by an amazing 2,249 per cent. **13**

It was this vision of what a free society could become that inspired Sam Sharpe to act and inspired the white missionaries and the other abolitionists to acts of volunteerism which have never since been surpassed in all our history. It was the high ideals of what a 'Free Jamaica' could be which kept them going and evoked from them immense acts of self-sacrifice in the cause of trying to make their vision a reality. This vision was soon to collapse, leading to the 1865 Revolt in Morant Bay, but while it lasted it was a powerful inspiration for action.

It is worth asking ourselves why this period of volunteerism did not last so as to understand what lessons might be learned for today. The problem was that Knibb's and the people's vision of a Jamaica in which the estates and the small farmers existed side by side in a partnership never became accepted by all sectors of the society. In this connection, it is of the utmost importance to note that it was not Knibb's intention to destroy the plantation system. In his testimony before a Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Free Village system, Knibb categorically stated that the purpose of the free villages was to provide people with a house spot and a home in which they could construct a family and community life *while seeking employment on the sugar estates*. This is precisely why he encouraged the siting of villages near to estates and why, in most cases, the lots of land sold to the people were so small. The intention was to reinforce plantation agriculture with labourers who would now be free people.

However, this compromise was not acceptable to the planters nor, for that matter, to Henry Taylor in the Colonial Office in London. They vigorously opposed the free villages putting every obstacle in the way of the missionaries acquiring land on behalf of the people

for settlement purposes. One consequence of this was that the post-Emancipation history of Jamaica was strikingly different from that of Barbados. After Emancipation in 1838, sugar production in Jamaica, which had been in decline for some years, fell even further. Between 1839 and 1848, sugar production fell by 36.7% to an annual average of 29,881 metric tons. Between 1849 and 1858, it fell a further 23% to 23,021 metric tons, recovering very slightly by 1868 (1.5%) to 23,367 metric tons.

In Barbados, on the other hand, after an initial decline of 17.5% between 1839 and 1848, sugar production recovered by an astounding 82.1% in the next ten years to reach an average figure of 27,904 metric tons annually. Over the following ten-year period - from 1859 to 1868 - sugar production in Barbados increased a further 25.3% to 34,960 metric tons. In the ten year period from 1825-1834, Jamaican sugar production had reached an annual average of 61,244 metric tons whereas Barbados was at a mere 13,616 metric tons. By 1868 Barbados was producing on an annual average over 10,000 metric tons more than Jamaica. **14**

The lesson behind these figures is clear to me: Jamaica failed because no side would give quarter and a compromise could not be found. Each side preferred to see the entire system fail rather than to search for some area of common ground for action. Despite the bitter divisions of history, Barbados achieved a compromise and progressed. Jamaica remained divided and declined.

This is a lesson for today as it was more than one hundred years ago. It is a lesson of great relevance for Jamaica now and for the issues of vision and volunteerism which confront us. I maintain that if we look at our history from this point of view an entirely different light is shed on Emancipation. It becomes much clearer that the purely 'heroic' account of Emancipation is inadequate. By 'heroic' I mean the kind of history of Jamaica, which attributes the success of Emancipation, either entirely to Sam Sharpe's Revolt of

Christmas 1831 or to the struggles of the 'Saints' in England or to some combination of the two.

More, much more, was involved, as anyone would know who has ever read the accounts of the proceedings in the British Parliament, especially the machinations of Lord Stanley, the Earl of Derby, at the time. These accounts make it clear that Emancipation also was made possible because a deal was struck. In the days close to the passage of the Bill it was, in fact, made possible by the triumph of that very English spirit of compromise and deal making. It was the switch in the vote in the House of Commons and the Lords of those in London with West Indian property. After holding out for £50 million sterling in compensation, they had relented and accepted the £20 million and a so-called 'apprenticeship' period. It was their switch to the Emancipation side that made it possible for the Bill to finally clear all the hurdles in Parliament and to be passed into law in 1833. In other words, Emancipation from Slavery did not occur simply because one group, either in Jamaica or in England, over-threw the other. It came because powerful groups with opposing interests found a middle ground on which they could negotiate, and finally accept, and so bring freedom to the enslaved. **15**

There was a time when I thought that these somewhat sordid negotiations in which less compensation money was traded for a longer apprenticeship period were an outrage. I thought that they sullied the entire Emancipation process and proved decisively the low commercial spirit of the English. Like many other Caribbean intellectuals, I yearned for a heroic interpretation of our history, in which Good (us) defeated Evil (them). And, I have to say, without naming any names, that this kind of Manichean interpretation of our past seems more fashionable than ever. The theory seems to be that 'the people' need an 'inspirational' history, not necessarily a truthful one.

Today I think no such thing. In fact, I would go further and publicly ask the impermissible question of whether or not such histories really advance us? In truth, the backroom, negotiations of Stanley and his friends in no way diminish the greatness of the accomplishment of Emancipation: they simply bring us face-to-face with the realities of life. These realities teach us that good is never totally on one side, Evil never totally on the other. A compromise, therefore, does not necessarily represent a sell-out, although it might. A compromise can also incorporate the better part of two opposing forces and, as a result, offer the society the chance to advance on a stronger foundation.

The tradition of searching for the middle way is one part of the English tradition, which we might do well to restore in Jamaica. It was the rejection of compromise by the planters which defeated the efforts to build a new society after Emancipation and which frustrated the vision of Knibb and others. But, as Douglas Hall's book *Free Jamaica* makes clear, there were many people in Jamaica, from various walks of life, who tried to make Jamaica work, in spite of the polarized situation. Contrary to the popular view, these may have been our real national heroes. For the real theme of the history of Jamaica cannot only be about how one group, however oppressed and whether in the majority or not, threw off its oppressors against great odds. The real theme of our history is the story of how liberation was won and how all sides learned slowly to overcome the bitter legacy of oppression which divided us and prevented us from building a united nation. Without such an approach to the discovery of the small compromises and adjustments of our past (how, in spite of our terrible behaviour to each other, we learned to be Jamaicans) then there can be no vision of the foundations of a nation in the present or future. I believe that this thread does run through our history or we would not be here as Jamaicans today. But it is a thin thread and our academics, including myself, are not of the mind to search for and to cherish it. But let us move on.

The second major peak of volunteerism in Jamaica is associated with the rise of Black Nationalism and the efforts of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the 1920s. The voluntary activity, which occurred in this period, is not well recounted and one of the most useful things, which could be done, is to commission a researcher to examine the period from this point of view. We do know, however, from the work of Rupert Lewis and Beverly Hamilton that Garvey developed extensive activities, especially in the cultural and, of course, the trade union and political fields." These activities were the work of volunteers, especially in the field of the arts. The activities, which the UNIA promoted at Edelweiss Park after 1929, played a critical role in the development of culture in Jamaica and need to be fully documented. But we do not know to what extent youth clubs and other community activities were also developed in this period by volunteers from the Garvey movement.

Again, this case of an upsurge in volunteerism is, most clearly of all, one connected to the growth of a particular vision. Garvey was inspired by the cause of uplifting Black people, at home and abroad. This meant to him the establishment of a powerful Black Nation in Africa, not for the purpose of Black people abandoning the Western world. His idea was that the establishment of an independent base for a Black Nation was indispensable if Black people in the West or anywhere else were to achieve respect. This extremely powerful vision of Black global emancipation, dignity and power based on the strength of a single modern Black nation in Africa is obviously very similar to the Zionist idea. It was what drove the activities of Garvey and those of his followers to go to any lengths to uplift Black people wherever they were to be found in the world.

Unlike the earlier period of volunteerism after Emancipation, the Garvey period did not so much collapse as it laid the basis for the

following period. This was the third major peak of volunteerism in our history and it took place during the later 1930s. It was inspired by the nationalist vision of Norman Manley of what a self-governing Jamaican Nation among the Dominion of Nations could be. In his famous speech launching the PNP in 1938 Norman Manley said:

*As I see it today there is one choice before Jamaica. Either make up our minds to go back to Crown Colony government and have nothing to do with our government at all, either be shepherded people, benevolently shepherded in the interest of everybody, with its highest ideal the contentment of the country, or have your voice, and face the hard road of political organization, facing the hard road of discipline, developing your own capacities, your own powers and leadership and your own people to the stage where they are capable of administering their own affairs.<sup>17</sup>*

This is the vision, which inspired the establishment of Jamaica Welfare in 1937 and that immense community development movement out of which many of the leaders of volunteerism in Jamaica in the twentieth century have come. Out of this came the Better Village Movement; the development of Pioneer and other Youth Clubs; the Cooperative and Credit Union movements; the spread of citizens' associations and many other civic bodies. As Norman Girvan points out in *Working for Development*, by 1948, after only 11 years of existence, Jamaica Welfare had activities in 236 villages, with 77 village committees, 51 community councils and 346 groups. There were 1, 180 organized groups in all, including 57 handicrafts groups and 261 cooperatives. One hundred and eighty-five savings unions, 30 buying clubs, 42 poultry groups and 185 self-help groups were also functioning." Of course, there were a number of active voluntary organizations in Jamaica before the advent of Jamaica Welfare. The Boy Scout movement had been formed as early as 1910 and the Girl Guides in



1912. In 1920, a Jamaican delegation of Scouts to the first World Jamboree was led by Noel Crosswell. Both the YMCA and the YWCA had been formed locally in the 1920s, along with various citizens' associations. D.T.M. Girvan estimated that prior to the formation of Jamaica Welfare, there had been about 10,000 persons 'attached to social organizations', apart, from the 15,000 members of the Jamaica Agricultural Association." Jamaica Welfare built on this foundation but dramatically expanded the base.

Because the followers of Norman Manley believed so strongly in the self-government mission, they were very well aware that in order for a country to become a nation, especially one with the history of oppression and divisiveness of Jamaica, much would have to be done to transform the conditions and outlook of the people. The colonial power had to be convinced that the country was capable of governing itself along democratic lines and that these values and principles had been successfully instilled into the people.

Likewise, the nationalists of Jamaica Welfare, who were very different from the Black nationalists who supported Garvey (although they overlapped), **20** had to convince the people that the goal of self-government was not just a constitutional advance which would bring 'brown man rule'. They had to show to the people that practical benefits would come to them at the grass roots level as a consequence of the struggle for self-government. Hence, 'better' villages and communities had to be encouraged and developed. Homes had to be built. Crops had to be marketed, along with fertilizer, farm implements and modern extension services. Irrigation was necessary, as were literacy and land reform, in order to transform the people from subjects into citizens. The youth and women were particularly important since what they did decisively determined the future of the nation. Indeed, although self-government was an end in itself, on a number of occasions the

Jamaica Welfare group argued that it was because they needed power to improve the lot of the people, that they needed to achieve self-government.

Thus the vision of self-government and the vision of community development were seen as one. It was the strength and power, of this vision, which drew so many volunteers into the field to build many of the voluntary organizations, which we know in Jamaica today. There can be little doubt that, without the efforts of these pioneers, Jamaica would have little civic sense of itself as a nation and the assertive self-respect and pride which are regarded, as being characteristically Jamaican would have withered away.

That vision too was lost in the social and economic divisions between the 'haves and have-nots' which emerged clearly by the late 1950s and in the early 1960s. Norman Girvan recounts his father's dismay at the state of the country when he returned from Ecuador in 1961, at the invitation of Norman Manley, to become the Executive Chairman of the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission. "Where have we gone astray?" he asked. Decrying, among other things, the "too great a preoccupation with racial, social and economic differences" among us as Jamaicans, Girvan concluded:

*But what is a great shock to us is the realization that somewhere along the road we have lost something of the vision, which we once shared. We need to ask ourselves: At what stage did we become less united, less tolerant, less confident in our friends, ourselves and in our future? 21*

No one came forward then to answer Girvan's telling question. Looking back we can see some of the weaknesses in the approach of the Jamaica Welfare volunteers. There was their disregard for urban conditions and their preference for working mainly among the more deferential small farmers in the countryside. There was

their lack of a deep grasp of economics and a tendency to attempt to substitute social solutions for problems for which there were only economic answers. More than they realized, quite a few people regarded them as arrogant, as typical Jamaican Brownmen - part of the elitist Drumblair Set - who maintained a social and colour exclusivity in their private lives while at the same time advocating social advancement for Black people. In other words, the vision of the nationalists, while genuinely inspiring to members of the middle classes and to the aspiring rural farmer, did not sufficiently speak to the conditions of the overwhelming majority of Jamaicans nor did it succeed in uniting them.

Jamaica's fourth peak of volunteerism occurred in 1972 with the election of Michael Manley to power on the slogan 'Better Must Come'. This victory was accompanied by a surge of national unity and patriotic feeling that at last Jamaica was going to pull itself together and go for-ward as a united nation. The enthusiasm generated a rapid growth in volunteerism in a wide range of activities. People from all walks of life worked long hours into the night in the name of what they believed to be the cause of the development of Jamaica for the benefit of all. Youth clubs and women's groups were formed, many thousands of persons volunteered to give literacy classes in JAMAL, new sports activities were supported while community and other organizations flowered. Again, this outpouring of voluntary effort was inspired by a vision that Jamaica could become economically better for all Jamaicans.

But this also was not to last. By 1974, a change had begun to occur in the vision, turning it in the direction of Socialism. By 1976 the vision was the doctrine of class struggle. The argument put forward was that improvement in the circumstances of life for the majority of Jamaicans required that the wealthier groups be subordinated. This doctrine of class struggle, of which I myself was a strong and ardent advocate, wrought great harm on the

country. It inspired a very wide range of voluntary activity but, on the other hand, it so divided the nation that it threatened to destroy the very framework on which the society depended for its existence.

The collapse of this vision of Socialism was replaced by no new vision. Instead, an outlook was promoted which has been dominant ever since: a very shallow concept of a market society (as opposed to a market economy). It is the idea that each person is to seek his or her own benefit and the society will take care of itself.

## **Vision and National Unity**

This leads me to my final point in this matter of vision. When one looks back at Jamaican history, it becomes clearer where we have failed as a society and where others, including others in the Caribbean, have succeeded. I put forward the thesis that Jamaica has failed to achieve social stability because we have focused on the issues, which divide us and not on those which unite us as Jamaicans. Our history of divisiveness means that statesmanship and compromise will be necessary if we are to focus on those issues which unite us, but Jamaican society will never develop unless all groups of all colours and social position are given the opportunity to contribute to its development. Moreover, if there is one lesson from the 1970s it is this: no group in Jamaica today has or is likely ever to have, in the foreseeable future, the power to permanently subordinate the other any other group. One group can block, and has in the past attempted to block, the advance of another. We have excelled at negative actions like this at many points in our history. But no one group, no matter how large, has the ability or the strength to develop Jamaica single-handedly, without the enthusiastic involvement of other social and ethnic groups inside and outside the society. This is a simple truth, which I fear has yet to sink into the skulls of some of our leaders, political and intellectual.

Moreover, Jamaica's economic and social possibilities compel us to seek greater access and integration into the global marketplace and into global society. No small economy can raise the standard of living of its people by focusing on domestic or regional markets. These are simply too small to absorb the scale of output which we will need to generate if we are to earn the necessary revenues to raise living standards. So our future depends on how outward looking we can become and on our ability to reduce chauvinism and insularity. Failure to grasp these simple truths has been and continues to be the bane of our existence and at the root of our

failure to achieve either social stability or real economic growth in the last twenty years. If we are to make this society viable, then leadership, which seeks to foster a genuine unity in Jamaican society and a broad outlook in the population is what we need.

We did not get this kind of leadership after Emancipation: the ex-slave-masters refused to compromise with the ex-slaves, with disastrous results for all. We did not get this either in the 1960s, for a huge gap emerged between the haves and the have-nots. We certainly did not get it in the 1970s, because we paid homage to the gods of class struggle and social divisiveness and this doctrine nearly destroyed Jamaica. What is the vision of the 1990s?

Is it that the vision of class struggle of the 1970s is to be replaced by a vision of racial struggle and national insularity in the 1990s? I myself believe that, yes, such doctrines are abroad in Jamaica today and at high levels of the society too. Many people, especially light-skinned Jamaicans, perceive that there is a not particularly subtle move afoot to sideline them, to make them feel that they are not 'true' Jamaicans and to promote a chauvinistic Black Nationalism as the ideology of Jamaica today. Many people perceive this with great bitterness in private but fail to denounce it publicly for fear of being labeled racists or because they think serious public discussion of the issue of race is taboo and not possible in Jamaica.

But chauvinism is chauvinism whether it is white, brown or black. It needs to be denounced because it is wrong. If it continues, it will destroy Jamaica far more thoroughly than socialism and the doctrine of class struggle were ever able to do in the 1970s. If chauvinism is the vision, then we can be sure of one thing: Jamaica will not get very far in its development efforts. We cannot avoid public discussion of this issue any more.

Let me say that it is not because this issue has been affecting me personally and directly that I wish to discuss it. On the contrary, I do not recall any episode of discrimination or slight against myself on colour grounds in Jamaica in recent years. Nonetheless, it is a fact that many Jamaicans from ethnic minorities who have made and continue to make priceless contributions to the development of the country in a range of different areas - from cultural and social development to the arts and business - now feel that their bona fides as Jamaicans are 'under review'. They are no longer welcome in Jamaica. They understand that Jamaica needed to change and are not seeking to retain old privileges. On the contrary, many of them have played a central role themselves in undermining privilege in Jamaica. But now they are not welcome. They and their children are on the receiving end of everyday racial slurs. They have to contemplate, however reluctantly, migration as the only viable option for the future of their families in the next generation. Those who think this problem will be solved by appointing a light-skinned or white Jamaican to chair a Board here or a Board there is in for some surprises. This new reverse tokenism will fail as certainly as the old one did. The opportunistic approach is not the way to build a new, unifying and inclusive vision or the reason to have such a vision. It is time, therefore, to speak up boldly and to have this issue openly aired.

On the other hand, the majority of Black Jamaicans in the inner cities feel that they are stigmatized as violent, criminal and worthless and that official Jamaica only wishes to use and abuse them. Hence, the 'sweet satisfaction' of proving uptown wrong by defeating them at sports - a major force motivating one of the most selfless volunteers in the field of sport in this country. There is also the very strong sentiment in the Black middle classes and Black sections of the business community that they have been discriminated against all their lives in the establishment and expansion of business activities of their own. Many feel that the official identity of the country - Out of Many, One People - has

been a not particularly clever way for powerful forces in Jamaican society to deny a leading role for our African heritage and for Black Jamaicans, especially in the business field. This group which, as the recent elections showed, has very broad popular support, is strongly drawn to various brands of Black Nationalism. For many of them, the whole point of having a Black Prime Minister is for the power of the State to be used to right the historic wrongs done to the Black majority and to actively foster the creation of a Black business class.

The question that we therefore face is whether or not there is a way to recognize a leading role for our African heritage while at the same time recognizing the very positive role played by European, Indian, Chinese, Lebanese and other cultures and peoples. Is it possible, as one colleague of mine put it, to have a Black Nationalism, which is not exclusionist? Can we have national pride and not be insular and chauvinistic? These are the questions which go to the heart of the instability of Jamaica today and which have to be publicly asked and answered if we are ever to have a united and prosperous Jamaica in which violence and social turmoil are no longer the order of the day. This is at the heart of the problem of vision, which Jamaica faces.

According to the way I see it, the root cause of our instability can be framed like this: the old social norms of Jamaica have collapsed and no new set of norms has replaced them. It is well that these old norms collapsed, because they were based on the subordination of people of one colour and class by those of another colour and class by means of tradition, habit, social custom and economic and political power. That system brought order into the affairs of the country and into everyday social interactions, since all groups could locate themselves in this colour-class hierarchy and had internalized the 'manners' to defer to their 'betters', as such a system defined them. This system was oppressive and unjust and fostered great resentment and bitterness in the society. But it also



restrained people's behaviour, at least at the overt level, and until the early 1960s was able to sustain a relatively low crime rate and to maintain social order, however unjust and immoral.

It was absurd and naive to think that such a system could long survive Independence in a country where at least 95 per cent of the population was of African descent. So it had to crumble and it has crumbled. But with that system also crumbled the stability of social interactions and the very foundations of our civil society, which was deeply rooted in this colour-class hierarchy. And no new system has been found to replace the old one. In this moral and cultural twilight zone, people behave to one another purely in terms of their narrowest definitions of self-interest, on a purely materialistic, vulgar basis or in terms of their 'small island' of family and friends. Because there are no widely accepted moral principles governing behaviour in the society as a whole which would make for predictable, orderly and constructive social relationships, we do as we like or as we think we can get away with. And all this is occurring locally when the rest of the world is changing very rapidly and at a time when Jamaica is more deeply than ever integrated by modern communications, economic relationships and migratory ties with the good and the bad of global society. This breakdown, and not simply the failures of police reform, is the deeper force behind our ever-spiraling homicide rate and our endemic social instability. This is the enormous problem, which we really have to address.

The task is not an easy one and we may well fail. I recall discussing this issue shortly after the general elections with an outstanding female Black professional. I argued that, if only for pragmatic reasons, Jamaica needed to incorporate light-skinned and White Jamaicans and expatriates into the leadership of its economic affairs and to stop making them feel that their money was welcome but they were not. I pointed out that public policy was confused because we claim that we are inviting foreign

investment but we forget that wherever large quantities of foreign investment go, significant expatriate communities of ethnic minorities are never far behind. Foreigners do not make large direct investments in another country without also sending in some of their own nationals from either the private or the public sector to oversee what is happening.

This is so when the Japanese invest in England and when the Chinese or Americans invest in Jamaica. The entire history, indeed the very origin, of Jamaica as a society is testimony to this point. The newcomers know when they are not welcome, no matter whether the economy is deregulated, macroeconomic stability exists and foreign exchange is available for profits to be repatriated. It goes much deeper than that. Much of the orthodox economic policy framework might be in place (as we have had) and still not get significant foreign investment because there is no social stability and the society is perceived as chauvinistic in its attitudes and hostile to foreigners. This is, I am sorry to say, how many foreigners perceive Jamaica, potential investors included.

My friend had not considered the matter from this angle before but now she did. After giving the matter some thought she replied very deliberately that if that were the price of economic development then we would have to do without it. She was not willing to compromise on this issue. So, addressing this question will be very painful and difficult.

It can be only addressed by statesmanship of the Mandela quality: statesmanship, which pursues a policy of advancing the interest of the majority group within the framework of a policy of reconciliation. A Nationalist may rightfully protest that the concern for reconciliation at the very point when the Black majority is trying to come into its own and overcome centuries of oppression is self-serving. No such concern for reconciliation was expressed when Whites and Browns reigned in undisputed control over

Jamaica and the Black majority was oppressed. Further, others may protest that a characterization of some local trends in Black Nationalism as chauvinistic is hypocritical cant, since no similar critique of white or brown chauvinism was or is made. Many sincere Black intellectuals will say that the argument presented here is merely a snare to undermine the resolve of the Black majority and to sow seeds of self-doubt at the very moment when victory in redefining the identity of Jamaica towards Blackness is on the horizon.

I understand the feelings behind these arguments and they contain many elements of truth. Many evil deeds were done and much bitterness has necessarily been generated. But revanchism is not a basis on which to build a healthy society, no matter how deep the hurt and how justified these feelings may be in the real history of the society. At some point we have to let go of this history and move on. Social revenge is only valid as a standpoint if we accept that Jamaican society must have an eternally adversarial framework and that ethnic minorities have made and can make little or no significant positive contribution to the development of Jamaica. Only if we accept the currently fashionable historiography which says that the history of Jamaica is the history of the struggle of one group (the Black majority) against the oppression other groups (the White and Brown minority) does the revanchist approach make even limited sense. This is certainly a major aspect of our history but it is by no means the only or even the most important aspect. Much destruction occurred during and after slavery and continues today, but our history is also and primarily a history of construction and creation.

A culture and society called Jamaica in which all shared certain common features, notwithstanding colour and class divisions, was created in this land. Many of our historians," mired in the ideologies of the past, are simply blind to this elementary point. The result is that we have little documentation or analysis of our

common Jamaicanness, what it consists of (other than a love of ackee and saltfish and hard dough bread!), whence it came and where it can go. But no market society can function for long on a purely contentious basis without experiencing the most serious consequences of social decay. All societies that have been successful, no matter how painful their pasts, have found ways of overcoming divisiveness and of forging bonds of common feeling and identity in order to go forward. Ways to shed our own baggage also have to be found.

This, and not the opportunistic and pragmatic arguments which I presented to my friend on the need to attract foreign investment, is the real argument for reconciliation and the inclusiveness of all groups in modern Jamaica, even as all groups elevate and appreciate our African heritage. White and Brown Jamaicans must understand and be proud of our African heritage. Equally, it is not because White and Brown or Chinese people in Jamaica have money and international contacts and can deter or attract local and foreign investment by a mere nod or a wink, that reconciliation must be pursued. We need the vision of an inclusive identity for its own sake. Because Jamaica's richness and vitality is rooted in our robust African peasant heritage as well as our traditions from yes, England, Scotland, India, China and the Lebanon and Christianity and Judaism and other beliefs.

I have not the slightest hesitation in proclaiming my pride in key aspects of our English heritage -the common law tradition and the thoughts of Hobbes and Locke, for example - which are the foundations of many of the everyday freedoms which Jamaicans of all colours take for granted and deeply cherish and for which we have to thank the English. Equally, I have not the slightest hesitation in proclaiming my pride in the powerful communal values of Africa, which we are close to abandoning with grievous social consequences. We desperately need the statesmanship which understands these issues and which can articulate them in popular

language to inspire us as a people to rise above our hurt and so unify the nation in a rediscovery of our forgotten Jamaicanness. Such a vision is possible and there is no doubt in my mind that the leader who articulates it effectively will unleash a flood of volunteerism and social effort which will put us on a road to social stability and development for the benefit of all.

## **Volunteerism and Vision**

To my way of thinking, volunteerism is an expression of the degree of moral and civic unity of a society. It is a measure of its state of spiritual integrity. 'Total strangers' in a society take steps to assist others in that society without seeking reward because they have a sense of common feeling and duty to each other. They do not, in fact, regard others as 'total strangers'. They recognize that they have moral claims on one another. That is what a real society is like.

If one, however, lives in a society in which such 'moral sentiments' are weak or dying, then this means that the foundation for volunteerism is also weak and dying. When this is the case, it is like a company in crisis: no amount of preaching or borrowing will revive a business, which is headed in the wrong direction. The expression rightly used in this case is that the company has to be 'turned around', it has to be completely restructured.

So it is with a society, though even more so since the simplest society is more complex and varied than the largest company. If volunteerism springs from strong sentiments of common feeling, then if those sentiments are lacking no amount of preaching and policy making and public relations can substitute for the void. No amount of inveighing against the decline in standards and nostalgia for the old can alter that sad reality. The moral sentiment is simply absent. We have a very strong sense of what we do not like about the state of affairs in Jamaica today - the high murder rate, the economic stagnation, the coarseness of everyday life, its volatility - we could all set out a long list. But knowing what is wrong is not enough. We need to develop a concept, a clear vision of what would make Jamaica right. Then we need to convince the rest of our society of the validity of that vision. This is the only way that a new upsurge in volunteerism, akin to some of the upsurges we have had in the past, can be brought back again.

In his famous short story 'Mario and the Magician', the great German novelist Thomas Mann wrote an allegory of the failure of Europeans in the 1920s to resist Hitler and Mussolini. Even though they knew fascism was wrong, they could not arrive at an agreed vision of what was right. Fascism therefore triumphed for, as Mann wrote:

If I understand what was going on, it was the negative character of the young man's fighting position, which was his undoing. It is likely that not willing is not a practicable state of mind; not to want to do something may be, in the long run, a mental content impossible to subsist on. Between not willing a certain thing and not willing at all - in other words, yielding to another person's will - there may lie too small a space for the idea of freedom to squeeze into .5

Thus it is not enough not to like the state of affairs in Jamaica. Not one of us does. The real challenge is to define a positive alternative of what the Jamaica should be that we can stand for and that we should be trying to bring into being.

No one has articulated a clear vision of what such a Jamaica would be like, of what we have committed ourselves to when we set out to declare ourselves to be a 'nation'. Why do we want to increase our GDP and for whom? Why do we want a good educational system, other than to satisfy our ambitions for our own children? Those who think that this is a constitutional problem to be resolved by changing from a monarchy to a republic or from a Parliamentary to a presidential system display a charming naivete. It would be nice if the problem could be resolved by such legal maneuvers. Unfortunately, to perceive the problem as a constitutional issue is to mistake the symptoms for the cause.

The cause is that there is no longer any clear vision of what Jamaica is or should be. There is no rationale behind the term 'Jamaican' which expresses any sense of common purpose. That is our fundamental problem. Many of us act out of conflicting visions of the Jamaica that suit our short term purposes. There is no common vision, which strongly unites a wide cross-section of the people of what it means to be a Jamaican. Therefore, there is almost no sense of what are our mutual obligations to one another. There are concepts of 'uptown' and 'inner city' and of 'Blackman', 'Brownman', 'Whiteman', 'Red Youth', 'Yellowman' but no overall concept of 'Jamaican'. There are abstractions such as Gross Domestic Product and economic growth but few are aware of these as requiring and justifying serious common effort. We deceive ourselves if we think our footballers can solve this problem for us, even if they play they hearts out, as they have done. We have to solve the problem for ourselves, as fellow Jamaicans or it will never be solved. We have to articulate this new vision.

Let me repeat: volunteerism is an expression of the level of moral commitment - the strength of the moral contract, if you will - made by the members of a society. If this contract is weak, easily broken, of little consequence or nonexistent, then volunteerism too will be weak, easily broken and virtually nonexistent. The fundamental issue therefore is how do we strengthen the moral bonds of Jamaican society? How do we give real meaning to this concept 'Jamaica'? How do we re-establish this positive vision of Jamaica, which once existed but which has clearly been found wanting and discarded? This is the real question behind the issue of strengthening volunteerism in Jamaica.

What is the form, which this twenty-first century vision of Jamaica must take to address the genuine concerns of all Jamaicans? And let me repeat, since some may not understand, or may not wish to understand, what I am getting at-of all Jamaicans, including uptown, light-skinned Jamaicans. All, and I mean all, must be



equal members of the Jamaican nation, if such a nation is ever to be successfully built. I will return to this most vital point which it is taboo to discuss publicly in Jamaica but which must be addressed if we are ever to go forward as a people. We must not repeat the mistakes of the 1970s in a new form but instead successfully make our way in the modern, highly competitive, globalized world.

Indeed, persistence in campaigns to stimulate volunteerism and better values and attitudes, without addressing the underlying root cause of why there are weak common bonds within the Jamaican society, is likely to evoke cynicism and to be counterproductive. In the end, it may make the job more not less difficult. So, if we wish to have a substantial growth in volunteerism in Jamaican society, we have to try to address this most forbidding challenge: How can we recover and display a sense of regard for one another and an interest in the well-being of our fellow citizens? In the name of what ideals and focusing on what goals can this be done?

These ideas are not entirely new and, indeed, have to some extent been expressed by some of our most thoughtful and sincere business leaders, including people in this room. However, perhaps understandably as practical persons of affairs, they think of this in economic terms. As one put it: "Let us unite the society behind the goal of achieving a doubling of the standard of living of all Jamaicans in ten years." This is, of course, a laudable idea and should be pursued with the greatest energy. The problem, however, is that for most people, economic advancement is a means to an end and not an end in itself. The question, therefore, to be answered sooner rather than later would be, in true Jamaican style: "Why should I put out an effort to increase the living standards of all Jamaicans as opposed to those of myself and my immediate circle of family and friends?"

In other words, the acceptance by large numbers of Jamaicans of mutual responsibility for the achievement of such an ambitious economic goal implies that a certain set of moral sentiments has already been accepted. It implies that we have reached the point where we see the necessity to take responsibility for the standard of living of all our fellow citizens, from Negril to Morant Point. The economic goals therefore presuppose that the moral goals have been articulated and have taken root, at least among a substantial minority of the leaders of the society. I do not see any evidence that this is so while I do see an abundance of evidence that it is not. There is thus no escaping the challenge of trying to formulate this positive vision for Jamaica in moral terms. This point may become clearer if we look at those periods in Jamaican history when volunteerism was at a height.

## **Conclusion**

Jamaica has had a strong tradition of volunteerism in the past and the tradition continues to exist today, albeit at a much lower level. The basic problem, as I see it, is that high points in volunteerism require the strong inspirational vision, which will evoke in people that extra concern for their fellow citizens, and motivate them to become volunteers. In today's Jamaica, no such unifying vision of national purpose exists and therefore we are not likely to experience the renewal of volunteerism, which the society so desperately needs. But we are not powerless.

We must not forget that entire areas of our national life, especially at the community level, were in many cases built by voluntary effort. Today, sports such as football and athletics would cease to exist in Jamaica were it not for that small band of dedicated persons. In other areas such as drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, youth activities, adolescent experiences, literacy and homework classes, professionals and volunteers together play a critical role. These people are true heroes of our times, toiling against great odds and without material reward for higher values and purposes in an often callous and indifferent society. We owe it to them to take practical steps to support and strengthen their work and to ensure that the vision and determination, which they display, are extended into a national vision, in which all Jamaicans can share and be united.

## Notes

1. 'Economic and Social Progress Report 1997: Latin America after a decade of reforms'. Inter-American Development Bank. Washington, DC: 1997.
2. Gordon, Derek, Patricia Anderson and Don Robotham. 'Urbanization during the Years of the Crisis'. In Alejandro Portes, Carlos Dore-Cabral and Patricia Landolt (eds.). *The Urban Caribbean: Transition to the New Global Economy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1997.
3. Interview with SMA, 4 December 1997.
4. O'Reilly, Michael. 'What happened to Jamaica?' *Daily Gleaner*, Thursday, October 23, 1997.
5. Mann, Thomas. 'Mario and the Magician'. In *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*. New York: Vintage 1930. pp. 173-174.
6. Rattray, A. R. *Ashanti Law*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1974. p. 286.
7. Robotham, Don. 'African Ethics and Ethnicity in Jamaica'. In *Social and Economic Studies*, 1998, forthcoming.
8. Rattray, *Ashanti Law*, p. 291.
8. De Swann, Abram. *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era* Cambridge: Polity Press. 1988.
10. - 1988, op.cit. p. 23.
11. For an account of the roots of the modern European welfare state in an older volunteer-ism, with a special emphasis on the Netherlands, see de Swann (1988) pp. 143 ff. For a discussion of Germany see Neaman, E.A. 'German Collectivism and the Welfare State'. *Critical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Fall 1990. For the classical modern discussions of this tradition see Raz, Joseph, *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1988), Gray, John, 'The Moral Foundations of Market Institutions'. In John Gray, *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment*.

- London: Routledge. 1993, pp. 66-123. See also Giddens, Anthony, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 1994. These are the leaders of the so-called 'radical centre' who provide the ideological foundations for the 'New Labour' regime of Tony Blair in Britain and also, to a lesser extent, for President Clinton's 'New Democrat' tendency.
12. Mintz, Sidney. 'The Historical Sociology of the Jamaican Church-founded Free Village
  13. System'. *Die West-Indische Gids*, 38-39, Sep. 1958. Pp. 46-70.
  14. Hall, Douglas. *Free Jamaica*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1973; see also Holt, Thomas C. *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labour, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1992. p. 154.
  15. Data are from Holt, Thomas C., *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers. 1992. Table 4. 1. Pp. 120-121.
  16. See Robotham, Don, 'The Notorious Riot: The Socio-economic and Political bases of Paul Bogle's Revolt'. Working Paper No. 28. Kingston: ISER-UWI. 1981.
  17. Lewis, Rupert. *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press. 1988; Hamilton, Beverly, 'Marcus Garvey and Cultural Development in Jamaica: A Preliminary Survey'. In Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan (eds.). *Marcus Garvey: His Work and Impact*. Kingston: ISER-UWI, 1988.
  18. Quoted in Girvan, Norman (ed.), *Working Together for Development*. D.T.M. Girvan on Cooperatives and Community Development. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica. 1993. p. xviii.
  19. - 1993. Op. cit. p. 219.
  20. - 1993. Op. cit. pp. 222-223.

21. The second wife of Garvey - Mrs. Amy Jacques Garvey – campaigned for Norman Manley in 1944 and Norman Manley had subsidized Garvey's paper, The New Negro Voice. See Lewis, 1988, op. cit. p. 274, for this extremely important piece of information. If Marcus Garvey and Norman Manley could develop a modus vivendi, this shows to me, that Jamaica can work!
22. Girvan, D.T.M. 'Let's not "Bill bush fe mek monkey run race".' Address to the staff of Jamaica Social Welfare Commission, 1961. In Girvan, 1993, op. cit. pp. 406-407.
23. Gordon, Anderson and Robotham. 1997. op.cit. Table 7.13, p. 220.
24. - 1997. op. cit. p. 219.
25. The locus classicus of the analysis of this new reality is the work of the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck. See Beck, Ulrich, Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity, translated by Mark Ritter. London: Sage Publications, 1994; and Beck, Ulrich, Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk, translated by Amos Weisz. Cambridge: Polity Press. 1995. See also Beck, Ulrich, 'The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization'. In Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the *Modern Social Order* Cambridge: Polity Press. 1994. This work, already alluded to as part of the now dominant 'radical centre', tries to show, among other things, that the rising levels of technical knowledge in the general public create the potential for a new kind of public professional volunteerism at the local level which is as effective, if not more so, as the technical expertise which governments and large firms can mobilize. The 'Greens' in Germany, France and the UK are usually cited as the prime examples of this kind of highly-educated 'professional activism' which, according to Beck, is vital for the health of modern day 'risk society'.
26. See Clarke. Colin, Urban Development and Social Change,

- 1962-1961. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; Norton, Ann 'Shanties and Skyscrapers: Growth and Structure of Modern Kingston', Working Paper No. 13. Mona, ISER-UWI, 1978; Hanson, Gerald Thomas, 'Shantytown Stage Development: The Case of Kingston, Jamaica. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University, 1978; Knight, Pauline and Omar Davies, 'An Analysis of Residential Location Patterns in the Kingston Metropolitan Area', Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 27. No. 4, 1978; Hatva, J.V., 'An Integrated Development Strategy for Kingston Metropolitan Area', UNDP/UNCHS Project JAM/82/0 10, Technical Report No. 19, 1986.
27. Gordon, Anderson and Robotham. 1997. Op. cit. Table 7.11, p. 218.
  28. But not all: see the many works of Douglas Hall, whose work I have had the occasion to disagree with very strongly in the past without appreciating the profoundly constructive and honest impulses, which have always inspired his work. He is probably our greatest living historian and his work, including that most interesting and discomfiting history of Grace is invaluable as a corrective to current intellectual fashions.